

Tikkun Leil Shavuot – What is It and Where Did it Come From?

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This workshop at NewCAJE 8, in 2017, dealt with the meaning behind the relatively new tradition of staying up all night to study on Shavuot — Tikkun Leil Shavuot. The first mention of Shavuot connected to Matan Torah, or the giving of the Torah, was in the 12th century, and the first time we see Jews staying up all night to study is during the 16th century.

At the beginning of the session, learners shared a Jewish event in their life and how they prepared for it. The facilitator then connected this preparation to the preparation we go through to receive the Torah anew every year during the Tikkun.

The main questions raised in this workshop were:

- ◆ What is the Tikkun?
- ◆ How does it prepare us to receive the Torah again every year?
- ◆ How do we use the message of the Tikkun to repair things in our world and as educators?

To answer these questions, we looked at five texts. Each one played a role in the development of the lesson:

1. A Prayer Before Learning on Tikkun Leil Shavuot: Kriey Moed (Baghdad, 1909). This showed us the language of fear and awe (thunder, lightning, shofars), together with unity and an emphasis on our right and responsibility in getting the Torah. Many verses discuss how EVERYONE was there on Har Sinai and that the inheritance of the Torah belongs to us all. We asked, “Why do we start the Tikkun with this blessing? What does it do for our intention in learning?” (Appendix A)
2. The Zohar, Part 3 (Vayikra) Parashat Emor 88a. This text gives us the spiritual backstory for the Tikkun. The text describes many couplings — between Oral Torah and Written Torah, between God and the Learners, between the Kneset Yisrael (Female representation of God) and the King, between Olam Hazah (this world) and Olam Haba (the next). The aim of the Tikkun is to connect these elements. This will bring connection and peace to this world and the next. We need to connect with others for this spiritual union to happen. (Appendix B)
3. Rabbi Yosef Haim, Ben Ish Chai, Hilchot Shana Rishona — Parashat Ba-Midbar. This text gives us an outline for what needs to be said during the Tikkun, along with physical instructions. We need to stand for the whole Tikkun. The texts bring up the idea of including all of the community in the Tikkun, as well as the non-intellectual recitation of sections from the Oral and Written Torah and Zohar. (Appendix C)
4. Rav Ovadia Yosef, Yekheveh Daat Responsa, Part 3, 32. This text reminds us that the Tikkun is a communal event. We should not separate from the community to study Talmud; we should stand together with the community to recite the order of the Tikkun. This is the Zohar’s spirituality in action — communal unity is the aim of the Tikkun. (Appendix D)
5. Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, pgs. 72,76, 81. This text brings the teachings of the Tikkun into our classrooms. The pedagogy of freedom that Freire teaches is similar to the teachings of the Ben Ish Chai and Rabbi Yosef. Dialogue and community are the key to learning; dialogue and community are the key to unifying the heavens and receiving the Torah. (Appendix E)

Tamar Zaken has spent over a decade directing Jewish Service Learning programs at Memizrach Shemesh-KIAH, the Center for Jewish Social Action in Jerusalem. She graduated from the Joint Program at Columbia University and the Jewish Theological Seminary and received an MSW from Wurzweiler School of Social Work at Yeshiva University.

At the end of the session, participants shared one important concept they learned and how they might integrate dialogue and community into their educational framework.

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Appendix A

Tikkun Leil Shavuot: From Kabbalah to Kehilah

A Prayer Before Learning on Tikkun Leil Shavuot: Kriey Moed (Baghdad, 1909)

“And it came to pass on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of a horn exceeding loud; and all the people that were in the camp trembled” (Exodus 19:16).

“And when the voice of the horn waxed louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by a voice” (Exodus 19:19).

“And all the people perceived the thundering and the lightning and the voice of the horn, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled, and stood afar off” (Exodus 20:14).

And it was said: “The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day. The Lord spoke with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire” (Deuteronomy 5:2-4).

And it was said: “Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath; but with him that standeth here with us this day before the Lord our God, and also with him that is not here with us this day” (Deuteronomy 29:13-14).

And it was said: “The Lord came from Sinai, and rose from Seir unto them; He shined forth from Mount Paran, and He came from the myriads holy, at His right hand was a fiery law unto them” (Deuteronomy 33:2).

“Moses commanded us a law, an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob” (Deuteronomy 33:4).

בקשה קודם הלימוד, ספר קריאי מועד, (בגדאד, תר"ע)

“ויהי ביום השלישי בהיות הבוקר ויהי קולות וברקים וענן כבד על ההר וקול שופר חזק מאד ויחדר כל העם אשר במחנה”. (שמות יט, טז)

“ויהי קול השופר הולך וחזק מאד משה ידבר והאלוהים יעננו בקול”. (שמות פרק יט, יט) “וכל העם רואים את הקולות ואת הלפידים ואת קול השופר ואת ההר העשן וירא העם וינועו ויעמדו מרחוק” (שמות כ, יד).

ונאמר: “ה’ אלוהינו כרת עמנו ברית בחורב לא את אבותינו כרת ה’ את הברית הזאת כי אתנו אנחנו אלה פה היום כולנו חיים. פנים בפנים דיבר ה’ עימכם בהר מתוך האש” (דברים ה, ב-ד).

ונאמר: “ולא איתכם לבדכם אנוכי כורת את הברית הזאת ואת האלה הזאת. כי את אשר יִשְׁנו פה עימנו עומד היום לפני ה’ אלוהינו. ואת אשר איננו פה עימנו היום” (דברים כט יג-יד).

ונאמר: “ה’ מסיני בא וזרח משעיר למו הופיע מהר פארן ואתה מרבבות קודש. מימינו אש דת למו” (דברים לג, ב). “תורה צווה לנו משה מורשה קהילת יעקב” (דברים לג, ד).

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Appendix B

The Zohar, Part 3 (Vayikra) Parashat Emor 88a

We have learned that the Torah one needs to toil with on that night is the Oral Torah, for it shall purify him\her, like the spring of a deep fountain. And only after this learning, on that day, the Written Torah will be brought, and s\he will connect with the Torah like a matching of a couple in heaven, and a voice will declare "And as for Me, this is My covenant with them, saith the Lord; My spirit that is upon thee, and My words which I have put in thy mouth" (Isaiah 59:21), etc...

And for this, the first Hasidim (pious mystics) would not sleep on that night, and toil with the Torah, for they said: We will come to take our holy inheritance for us and for our children, in both worlds.

And on that same night *Kneset Yisrael* (feminine aspect of God in Kabbalah) decorates herself in them and unites with the king, and both of them decorate the heads of those who have the privilege to do so. Rabbi Shimon said this: When students gather on that night at my house, they will come to fix the jewelry of the bride so she will be found tomorrow in her jewelry, and in her decorations (*Tikuneiha*) for the king, as is suitable.

ספר הזוהר, כרך ג (ויקרא) פרשת אמור, דף פח עמוד א
ולמדנו שהתורה שצריך לו לעמול בזה הלילה תורה שבעל פה, כדי שיטהרו כאחד ממעין הנחל העמוק. אחר כך בזה היום יביא תורה שבכתב, ויתחבר בה וימצאו כאחד בזיווג אחד למעלה, אז מכריזים עליו ואומרים: "ואני זאת בריתי אותם אמר ה' רוחי אשר עליך ודברי אשר שמתני בפיך" (ישעיה נט, כא) וגומר. ועל כן החסידים הראשונים לא היו ישנים בזה הלילה, והיו עמלים בתורה, ואומרים נבוא לרשת ירושה קדושה לנו ולבנינו בשני עולמות. ואותו לילה כנסת ישראל מתעטרת עליהם ובאה להזדווג בו במלך, ושניהם מתעטרים על ראש אלו שזוכים לכך. ר' שמעון כך אמר, בשעה שנאספים החברים בזה הלילה אצלו, נבוא לתקן תכשיטי הכלה כדי שתמצא למחר בתכשיטיה ותיקוניה אצל המלך כמו שיאות.

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Appendix C

Rabbi Yosef Haim¹, Ben Ish Chai, Hilchot Shana Rishona - Parashat Ba'midbar, 4

The order of the learning on this night begins with the Torah Prophets and Writings, followed by the Midrash and the Hidra Rabba² (passages from the Zohar). As the holy book of Zohar says: "To toil with the Torah from Torah to Prophets, and from Prophets to writings and the drashot of the verses and the secrets of the wisdom." And the 613 commandments should be taught before the Midrash, and if there is time, they should study the Hidra zutta as well. And both Hidrot should be studied while standing up, as we learned from our Rabbi the HIDA³ may his memory be a blessing, even in old age, may we be happy then, with our portion.

. רבי יוסף חיים, בן איש חי, הלכות שנה ראשונה, פרשת במדבר, אות ד
סדר הלימוד בלילה הזו, תחלה תורה נביאים וכתובים, ואחר כך המדרש, ואחר כך האדרא רבא. כי כן מפורש בזוהר הקדוש: "לעמול בתורה מתורה לנביאים, ומנביאים לכתובים, ובדרשות הפסוקים ובסודות החכמה" ותרי"ג מצוות ילמדו קודם המדרש, ואם יש להם זמן, ילמדו האדרא זוטא גם כן. וכבר נודע מנהגו של רבינו חיד"א ז"ל, ללמוד בלילה זו שתי האדרות מעומד, גם בעת זקנתו אשריו ואשרי חלקו

Appendix D

Rav Ovadia Yosef, Yekheveh Daat Responsa, Part 3, 32

It is good to pay heed and listen to our rabbis, the kabbalists and to learn during the Tikkun in a group. And if the community is reading the Tikkun together, it is not acceptable for individuals to break off from this group and to study Talmud or Rambam, as our rabbis of blessed memory said (Masechet Derech Eretz Zuta chapter 5): "One should not stand near those who sit or sit near those who stand, one shouldn't study Torah among those who are studying Mishna and shouldn't study Mishna among those who are studying Torah. In short, people should not act differently than the tradition of those around them". And nothing needs to be added. And God, may He be blessed will not hold goodness from those who act innocently.

הרב עובדיה יוסף, שו"ת יחוה דעת, חלק ג, סימן לב
ורק מהיות טוב נכון לחוש לדברי רבותינו המקובלים ללמוד התיקון בכנופיא ובחבורה. ואם רוב הצבור קוראים התיקון, אין ראוי ליחידים לפרוש מהם, וללמוד תלמוד או רמב"ם, וכמו שאמרו חז"ל (במסכת דרך ארץ זוטא פרק ה'): "לא יהא אדם עומד בין היושבים או יושב בין העומדים, ולא קורא מקרא בין השונים משנה, ולא שונה משנה בין הקוראים מקרא. כללו של דבר אל ישנה אדם ממנהג הבריות". עד כאן. והשם יתברך לא ימנע טוב להולכים בתמים.

Appendix E

Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, pgs 72,76, 81

In the banking concept of education knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry. The teacher presents himself to his students as their necessary opposite; by considering their ignorance absolute he justifies his own existence....The more completely the majority adapt to the purposes which the dominant minority prescribe for them (thereby depriving them of the right to their own purposes), the more easily the minority can continue to prescribe... Education as the practice of freedom---as opposed to education as the practice of domination---denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent and unattached to the world; it also denies that the world exists as a reality apart from people. Authentic reflection considers neither abstract man nor the world without people but people in relations with the world. In these relations consciousness and world are simultaneous: consciousness neither precedes the world nor follows it.

1. Rabbi Yosef Chaim, also known as the Ben Ish Chai, 1909-1834, learned rabbi, arbiter of Jewish law, Jewish liturgical poet, and community leader in Iraq. His most famous book was entitled *The Ben Ish Chai* and that is how he got his name. The book is made up of sermons he gave on Shabbat.
2. The Hidra Rabbah and the Hidra Zuta are two parts of the Zohar. In the Hidra Rabba, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochay discovers God in the character of a man, then 10 students give drashot, and Rabbi Shimon closes the discussion. The Hidra Zuta describes the death of Rabbi Shimon, where he tells his students secrets that he was afraid to reveal beforehand. At the end, Rabbi Shimon's soul leaves him on the word "Chaim."
- 3 Rabbi Chaim David Azoulai, also known as the HIDA, 1724-1806, was born in Hebron and died in Italy. He was a great rabbi and traveler and wrote a hundred books on Jewish topics.